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New medical emojis: letter of support

The recent JAMA article entitled “Emoji for the Medical Community--Challenges and Opportunities” described how Emoji will be a part of global, mainstream dialogue for the foreseeable future. We support efforts for the incorporation of an anatomical stomach and intestine Emoji into the Unicode Consortium and believe there is consensus among the physicians of the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) that both an anatomical stomach and anatomical intestine Emoji would ultimately improve the accessibility and quality of health care in the digital age.

As of September 2020, there are 3,521 Emoji in the Unicode Standard. Roughly two dozen of these are directly relevant to medicine. There are medically and anatomically accurate Emoji for the brain, heart and lungs. There are hundreds of food and beverage options for Emoji including water, fruit, vegetables, cheeseburgers, beer and wine. There is already an Emoji to represent *Pile of Poo*. Yet no Emoji for the stomach and intestines despite their crucial role and universality in human health.

Evidence suggests that Emoji used in health care settings can improve tangible health outcomes. The introduction of new Emoji characters showcasing the complex anatomy of the stomach and intestines represents an opportunity for gastroenterologists to open conversation to discuss complaints regarding these organs, including abdominal pain, appendicitis, stomach ulcers, and cancers of the stomach and colon. Emoji are already normally used in digital communication, and modern medicine frequently uses visual analogue scales to communicate with patients, especially the pediatric population. It can help patients come to terms with often life-changing information when these diseases arise.

We believe that this simplified communication method using the pictographic symbol would have a widespread impact on population health. Children with new diagnosis of the stomach or intestines will be able to see that they are represented. Health care providers will be able to talk about this organ more readily. It is an opportunity to promote tolerance, inclusion and education about the stomach and intestines in a modern, accessible, and international way.

For these reasons, AGA supports the development of a stomach and intestine Emoji.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Serena
Chief Executive Officer
American Gastroenterological Association

